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ABSTRACT

This study examines Chicano students' perceptions of disciplinary actions experienced or witnessed. A qualitative methodology, including focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and field work (classroom observations, student school records, and teacher interviews) examines operative factors during student-teacher confrontations. Students (N=4) were selected from an urban secondary school. The data reveal that these students perceive school as a place centered on the needs of school staff, which resulted in feelings of alienation and disempowerment for the students. They describe the differences of perceptions between themselves and teachers on two distinct levels: the content of the disciplinary event and their conceptual view of specific components of the misbehavior as opposed to what they perceive as the general, "whole package," account stated by staff. Confrontations are described as a result of perceived injustices in the application of rules when different sets of values, attitudes, and beliefs are held by students and teachers. Knowledge of the disciplinary consequence did not influence their decisions to comply. (Contains 36 references.) (Author)

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ED 383 811

DISCIPLINE: CHICANO STUDENT PERCEPTION

Ethnic Integrity or Maladaptive Behavior?

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Chicano student perception of disciplinary actions experienced or witnessed. A qualitative methodology, including focus groups, semi-structured interviews and field work (classroom observations, student school records and teacher interviews),examines operative factors during student-teacher confrontations. Students (N = 4) were selected from an urban secondary school. The data reveals that these students perceive school as a place centered on the needs of school staff which resulted in feelings of alienation and disempowerment for the students. They describe the differences of perceptions between themselves and teachers on two distinct levels: the content of the disciplinary event and their conceptual view of specific components of the misbehavior as opposed to what they perceive as the general, "whole package," account stated by staff. Confrontations are described as a result of perceived injustices in the application of rules when different sets of values, attitudes and beliefs are held by students and teachers. Knowledge of the disciplinary consequence did not influence their decisions to comply.

INTRODUCTION

They don't want you in their class. You're just a kid that's there.
(Jaime, CM1)

Are the factors causing disciplinary problems perceived differently by students and teachers? When and why do students choose not to follow traditional school rules? Is behavior influenced by student ethnic identity, racial attitude, cultural background, gender and level of academic attainment? These questions sought knowledge from a Chicano student perspective to help understand why they are 'at risk' behaviorally. Since students from groups of color experience a disproportionately high level of disciplinary action (Williams, 1992), what is their role in addressing the disciplinary issue? Placing the focus on student perceptions assumes that they are active participants in the educational process, and that they influence classroom events as much as they are affected by them (Schunk, 1992). Therefore, current theories of classroom practices and policies influencing and, perhaps inadvertently, causing behavioral conflict must not only be examined contextually and socially but also in relation to the attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of the participants. This includes the analysis of student thought and belief about self, teachers and discipline, which is the purpose of this study.

Theoretical scholarship in the areas of discipline, disparity of student-teacher perception and cultural discontinuities guide the study. A description of the methodology and limitations follows. The paper concludes with results, discussion and significance.

CONCEPTUALIZING THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Literature describing the disparity in perceptions of teachers and students (Brophy & Good, 1986; Schunk & Meece, 1992; Wigfield & Harold, 1992) indicates that perhaps this variance in perceptions may be a factor in behavioral conflicts that result, in part from these perceptions. New paradigms, explaining mismatches in interactional patterns of home and school cultures, may provide a theoretical framework for exploring what occur when the beliefs, values and norms of home and ethnic culture not only differ but are in opposition to that of schooling (Boykin, 1986; Au, 1994; Shade, 1994; Gay, 1981, 1994). The scholarly literature in these areas of discipline, disparity in student-teacher perceptions and cultural discontinuities were helpful in conceptualizing the problem.

Discipline

Discipline is perceived as a major problem in schools (Garza-Lubeck, 1992; Elam, Rose & Gallup, 1993) and students from groups of color are identified as most 'at risk.' Disruptive problems are disproportionately prevalent among ethnic minorities and often culminate in high

drop-out rates (Leriche, 1992; Velez, 1989; Fine, 1986). Researchers documenting the influences contributing to the high incidence of behavioral problems in schools include causal factors such as poverty (Finn, 1989) and school policies and practices leading to low student achievement and alienation (Oakes, 1985; Nieto, 1992).

Studies on teacher competence describe classroom management styles that influence disciplinary issues (Williams, 1992; Leriche, 1992). For example, Leriche (1992) alleges that teachers who rely on power to control and manipulate their students are less successful disciplining students than teachers who are able to gain respect from their students and thus are able to use a legitimate authority role that requires no social justification. Mitchell and Spady (1983) describe modes of classroom management where teachers use either honor or shame to reward or punish students thus personally accepting or rejecting students. They add that rules that do not inspire voluntary cooperation control students through coercion.

Graham and Hudley (1992) argue that student perception of the conflict act must be understood before mediation and change can occur. For example, teaching aggressive students to control their anger, rather than understanding student perception of the intent of the negative act, is not as effective as interventions designed to teach students to realize that anger may be an appropriate emotional response only when the negative action is intentional.

Disparities Between Student-Teacher Perception

The literature describing the disparity in perceptions of teacher and students indicates that student and teacher perception affect their actions and may help explain the resulting disciplinary outcome (Brophy & Good, 1986; Schunk & Meece, 1992; Wigfield & Harold, 1992). This research describes how teacher perceptions influence student achievement and may act as self-fulfilling prophecies (Brophy & Good, 1983; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). These teacher perceptions are relevant to disciplinary issues especially as directed towards children of poverty and color. Phelan (1987) draws a causal relationship between poverty and low academic achievement. He also claims that low academic achievement causes delinquent behavior and precipitates student drop-out. Negative teacher attitudes toward low income students and the assignment to low ability classes are also correlated with aggression and delinquency (Reed, 1988; Rist, 1970; Oakes, 1985; Hamilton, 1986).

According to Schunk and Meece (1992), a limitation of past research regarding the influence of the teacher perception on student achievement and behavior was that it offered a limited view of the role of student perceptions of the classroom. They assert that although student beliefs are influenced by classroom events, student perceptions affect and can mediate classroom events. Social cognitive theory also confirms the importance of student perception by emphasizing that students acquire knowledge, rules, beliefs and attitudes by observing others (Bandura, 1986). However, if student perceptions affect learning and behavior, issues of difference and degrees of acceptance of the social and cultural structures

of schooling must be addressed, especially if these differences are in opposition to the student ethnic and cultural mores.

Cultural Discontinuities

Conflicts among students and teachers may be rooted in the cultural discontinuities operating in pluralistic classrooms (Gay, 1981; Shade, 1994; Boykin, 1994). Cultural discontinuity (Spindler, 1987) is based on the premise that students from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds often do poorly in school because the school culture and the home culture often clash. This is due to possible misunderstandings in the interactions among students and teachers due to mis-matches in life-styles, values, experiences and socialization practices in the school and home cultures (Au, 1994, Nieto, 1992;Shade, 1994). Generally, the more harmonious the home and school culture are, the more success is experienced by students.

Gay (1981) theorizes that conflict among teachers and students results from dissimilar goals, behavioral patterns, cultural codes, value systems, and background experiences. She classifies this conflict as three types: procedural, substantive, interpersonal. Procedural conflict refers to a particular way of following established behavioral protocals. In the classroom, it relates to the body of rules and regulations administered by teachers that determine the steps to follow in a given situation. Substantive conflict refers to the essential characteristics and expressions of the content of instuction, the subject matter being taught. This type of conflict may occur when the academic goals and expectations of students and teachers differ. Substantive conflicts may take place when students challenge the instructional content or refuse to participate in curricular activities. Interpersonal conflict is the social behavior that transpires in the relationship between individuals in a given setting. Interpersonal conflicts in the classroom stem from different values, beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, and bad behaviors of teachers and students.

Gay (1981) posits that of these three types of conflict interpersonal ones are the most consequential. They can require mental, social, and psychological energy, time, and effort that distract students and teachers from instructional tasks. Boykin (1986), Au (1993), and Shade and New (1993) argue that these tensions and their potentially negative consequences intensify when students and teachers do not share the same cultural backgrounds and ethnic identities. Furthermore, degree of acceptance of school culture by students is another source of conflict.

According to Freeman (1992) classroom conflict can be a consequence of incompatible perceptual differences between teachers and students when either believes their needs and values are threatened. Perceptions are influenced by biases that operate in the "ego-centric view" individuals use to interpret their social sturcutre, and are directly affected by social, ethnic, and cultural affiliations. These differences in the backbrounds of the individuals often lead to perceptual disparities and social incompatibilites in interpersonal interactions.

These incongruencies can cause the actions of teachers to be discriminatory and detrimental toward students whose cultural backgrounds and values differ from their own (Spindler & Spindler, 1993). Although dissimilar people are not always disliked, Byrne, (1971) found that individuals tend to prefer those who share similar values and attitudes and disfavor those who disagree with what they believe. For example, teachers whose cultural backgrounds value passive, quiet working environments might penalize students who move around and talk during seat work. Consequently, when cultural and family socialization patterns are in direct opposition to school cultural expectations the potential for classroom conflict increases.

A possible response is the student decision to resist the institutionalized disparities caused by cultural discontinuities and instead choose to maintain their ethnic integrity when there is a clash of values (Gay, 1981; Boykin, 1994). Therefore, culture influences student perceptions, judgments and behaviors and determines how they adapt to their social environment (Shade, 1994). The problem for educators is how to prevent student misbehavior or what can they do to suppress and redirect the behavior once it occurs (Charles, 1989). Since, teachers in their disciplinary role reflect and develop the attitudes and thinking patterns of the dominant society, students may not necessarily consider their behavior inappropriate. When and why students choose not to follow traditional rules may indicate that students are affirming their sense of self worth by acting and choosing actions reflecting cultural and internal values (Boykin, 1986).

Additionally, although Au (1994), Nieto (1992), and Shade (1994) base their arguments on learning behavior rather than disciplinary issues a causal relationship between the outcomes of low academic achievement, cultural discontinuities and misbehavior has been established (Quay, 1987; Reed). Students who do not achieve academically often are not engaged in the learning process. Doyle (1986) explains that order, as well as learning, in the classroom is directly related to student engagement on task. Thus, students who are not engaged on the task in school may begin with misbehaviors that are perceived to be less serious. This includes student actions categorized as 'disruptive behavior' or a misbehavior that is considered inappropriate within the classroom setting, such as talking loudly, walking around the room and 'fooling around.' According to Charles (1989), most of the teacher time in urban classrooms dealing with misbehavior is expended on this type of student disruptive actions. However, as the frustration and alienation resulting from non-achievement build, this less serious behavior may escalate to hostile behavior toward authority resulting in student aggression prompting suspensions, expulsions and high drop out rates (Quay, 1987; Reed, 1988)

Doyle (1986) provides a different cultural perspective to student misbehavior. He concludes that student-teacher perceptions on disciplinary issues are dissimilar and result in different outcomes and consequences. However, this may not be the result of incompetence

or differential treatment toward specific students, rather it is due to the contextual specificity of the rules when applied in the classroom.

METHODOLOGY

This study, using a qualitative methodology, examined student perceptions of discipline. Discipline is defined as misbehavior that is considered inappropriate within a specific setting. According to Doyle (1986) a key to understanding discipline is to view it as students do within the classroom context. From this perspective misbehavior is visible, public, contagious and perceived and judged by the teacher as competing or threatening the activity of the moment. Thus, Doyle separates issues of classroom management from issues of discipline. For example, the "no talking out of turn" is a rule designed to enhance classroom management. However, students and teachers may perceive this rule differently or even feel it is applied unfairly or inconsistently. Teachers may judge and act differently toward a student whom they perceive is advancing the lesson by "talking out of turn" versus the student they perceive to be delaying or slowing down the lesson. In turn student reaction to the teacher act may be based on their perception of what is just or unjust, or how they judge the teachers' competence and inconsistency. Thus misbehavior may not be the property of the action, rather it is the judgment of an action in context. Therefore, to address the issue of discipline, the process that is used to determine the action taken as well as student perspective cannot be left out of the analysis and interpretation of what influences, produces, controls and affects what is ultimately judged to be appropriate or inappropriate behavior. The complexity of the student-teacher interaction necessitates a qualitative methodology to study discipline as a substantive issue, and in particular discipline as perceived by Chicano students.

Past research on discipline, using a quantitative tradition, has been directed to questions examining how classroom order and management are maintained, how to eliminate and correct disciplinary problems in order to "get on" with the act of teaching (Doyle, 1986). Studies have documented and identified disciplinary problems that interfere with teacher ability to teach (Cruichshank, 1981). Maintaining control was identified as the major issue causing teachers stress, exhaustion and frustration. This quantitative research contributes to the content base of disciplinary problems, but it does not address why students misbehave. It does not take into account the personal attributes of teachers and students affecting interactions in the classroom. Allowing participants to express their perceptions from their own frame of reference can provide in-depth information of the process taking place. This study acknowledges that different individuals in the same social setting are likely to have varying perspectives, and aims to capture multifaceted accounts.

Participant Selection

The study took place in a high school in an large urban school district. To select the students (N = 4), a district generated computer printout listed the Latino students in the school.

The printout was screened to remove students with a South American, Central American, Puerto Rican, Mexican and Cuban heritage but who were not native U.S. born. Biracial and biethnic students were also excluded. The focus was on a specific cultural group, Chicanos.

Two of the students, one male and one female, had the highest number of disciplinary actions, and two had the least occurrences of disciplinary actions. Criteria for selection did not include grade level and used the frequency (total number of referrals, suspensions and expulsions) and severity of the misbehavior. The range of experiences of these students provided a greater understanding of the differing conditions under which disciplinary issues operate, including how, where, when and why they take place. The student for this investivation were selected purposefully and conceptually in order to provide the breadth of information needed. These students' disciplinary problems were considered representative of the range of disciplinary problems students experience.

In this study, to capture the perception of students regarding disciplinary problems experienced in schools, data from classroom observations was simultaneously combined with an analysis of student records and participants interviews. In order to provide a balance of the type of information generated from the classroom observation and teacher interview, teachers (N = 4) were student-selected. Each student-participant selected his or her first and second choice of the classrooms in which to be observed and the teachers to be interviewed. Students chose teachers they liked best or the classrooms in which they felt they were most successful and affirmed. All the students' first choices were used. Selecting the teachers at random might have included teachers who the students were indifferent toward or perhaps disliked. This might bias student interactions in the classroom during the observation as well as interfere with the teacher's perspective regarding student behavior. Most importantly, it would not meet the variety of perspectives needed from the data sources as required by triangulation. Therefore, if the selected students identify teachers whom they perceive to be fair, effective and accepting of them in the application of classroom rules, this gives another position to the data that reduces bias of the sources of the data set. The assumption is made that these teachers meet student expectations of competence and fairness in classroom interactions.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

The design included semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations. According to Miles and Huberman (1984), a characteristic of qualitative research is that analysis occurs throughout the process; therefore, the data collection and analysis must be interwoven from the beginning. The collection dates and events in this study were purposefully sequenced and interspersed with time for data reduction, time to draw conclusions and test conclusions through other analysis or new rounds of data collection. For example, this study allowed the researcher to collect data, transcribe the data, assess the meaning and refine future collection of the data based on prior field findings. The sequence of

activities was designed to take maximum advantage of the qualitative tradition of continual analysis.

The initial interview was used to schedule subsequent activities. The focus group contained a major portion of the raw data. Observations and examination of student records added contextual knowledge about student-teacher behavior. The teacher interview provided another perspective on student behavior. The final interview occurred after the data from the interviews, focus groups, observations and student records were transcribed and reviewed and probing questions further clarified, confirmed or disconfirmed evidence of the emerging assertions.

Semi-structured Interview: Interviews were the first and last activity in this study. Each student was involved in an initial interview and final interview at the conclusion of the study. The initial interview established an interpersonal relationship with the students and provided biographical data such as age, grade, language proficiencies, and schools attended. Inquiry of past referrals, suspensions, expulsions or appeals of disciplinary action was made. Students described and explained a referral, suspension, expulsion or appeal of their choice. They discussed the best and worse moment of their educational life in high school. They were encouraged to explain why they remember these events. When they choose to tell an event that was not 'classroom' related, or if they stated there was nothing good or bad for them in schooling experiences, additional probing helped them remember an experience.

When the final interview took place, transcriptions of the initial interview, focus groups, classroom observations, school records and teacher interviews were available for students to peruse. As a result of the on-going analysis throughout the study, participants elaborated on selected parts of these documents in order to clarify and understand emerging assumptions and/or inconsistencies found in recurring patterns and themes. Thus, the final interview provided additional in-depth information regarding the beliefs and perceptions of the participants regarding the disciplinary issues previously described. It explored and probed for feelings, beliefs and motives, thereby "seeing" why they acted in the manner in which they did. The interviews took one to one and a half hours. The raw data from the interviews were transcribed and coded by identifying categories, themes, and events.

Focus Group: The focus group engaged students in a conversation model. Researchers who have used this technique find that it enhances recall, reveals more information, encourages participants to higher levels of dialogue, encourages dynamic group interactions that improve the quality of responses, does not limit the scope of responses, elicits a natural form of probing from the participants rather than the researcher and encourages student perspectives in a socially natural pattern (Sapp & Temares, 1993; Hendershott & Wright, 1993; Byers, Pessy, & Wilcox, 1991). In addition, King and Mitchell (1990) argue that the "group conversation" reduces tension, affirms shared cultural perceptions, and provides a way to critically examine participant emotions and experiences with the aim of contributing to

social problem solving. They argue that this group approach facilitates discussion of deeply felt issues by allowing participants to share experiences which contrast with the Eurocentric individualistic approach relying on written or single participant-researcher interactions.

In this study there were two focus group sessions. The first focus group solicited descriptions of personal disciplinary experiences as well as descriptions of actual classroom conflict witnessed or experienced. The second focus group asked students their opinion of why confrontations occur, and how they can be avoided or ameliorated. Each focus group was video taped, transcribed, coded and written as a single protocol for purposes of interpretative analysis. The raw data from the focus group were transcribed and double checked for accuracy by listening to tapes a second time after each transcription was entered into the computer.

Classroom Observations: The descriptive data generated through classroom observations provided information about the way students and teachers interacted with each other, other students and the classroom environment. The descriptive data from observations provided a basis for further analysis of specific behaviors that were probed during final interviews.

Each student was observed once in a classroom setting. The subject matter was determined by student choice of teacher. The male students chose teachers who taught science (first period) and language arts (third period). The female students chose teachers who taught science (third period) and language arts (sixth period). All the teachers were White, two female and two male. The aim of the student observations was to gather a primary source of data about student behavior in a naturally occurring context of schooling. The observation provided additional information for possible discussion during the final semi-structured interview. It was another data source for viewing student-teacher behaviors.

School Records: Examination and documentation of the student school records were made with attention given to factors identified by the review of scholarship on discipline indicating the possible presence of behavioral issues. These factors included referrasl, suspensions, expulsions, grades, poor work slips, and excessive absences. A summary of each students' disciplinary school profile was made and shown to the student at the final interview. Student comments were recorded and probing on specific elements of the student records were made based on questions formulated as a result of the on-going data analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

The initial descriptive coding used categories suggested by Gay (1981) of the types of conflict found in pluralistic classrooms: procedural (P), substantive (S) and interpersonal (I). These initial descriptive coding categories provided an efficient and effective data reduction process for interpretative analysis that documented emerging themes and patterns of conflict.

Code-recode consistencies and inter-rater coding were used for definitional clarity, reliability and validity checks (Miles & Huberman, 1984). For example, slices of the raw data

from each data source were coded twice, then compared for consistency and researcher error. Inter-rater coding was established with one other individual coding the raw data. Twenty-five percent of the raw data was coded by two raters for a minimum of 90% accuracy.

The theory testing used the standard method described by Fielding (1988). In order to see if the hypothesis related to the data, two basic steps occurred: the use of constant comparison between cases and the search for deviant cases. Both of these relied on methods of counting. The process of analysis included classifying and categorizing the data into conceptual categories that provided evidence to make assertions. First, this involved identifying relationships, patterns and themes. Frequency or counting the "number of times" something happens was one way used. These "clusters" or distributions were visually organized by 'matrix tables' which assisted in drawing and verifying conclusions.

LIMITATIONS

Teacher perceptions were solicited after the classroom observation. They were not interviewed throughout the study, therefore, data from this source was limited since only one classroom observation was made. The second focus group discussion had been previously scheduled and was held as scheduled immediately after the two male students had been suspended, the suspension appealed and then the suspension turned into an "emergency expulsion" that overruled the appeal. This created an urgency for the students to vent their emotions. There is also the possiblity that the focus group discussions might have been influenced by "group think" and peer pressure.

RESULTS

Four themes emerged from the data: (1) The data reveal that these students perceive school as a place centered on school staff's needs resulting in feelings of alienation and disempowerment for the students. (2) These students described the differences of perceptions of disciplinary issues between themselves and teachers on two distinct levels: the substance of the disciplinary event and their conceptual view of specific components of the misbehavior as opposed to what they perceive as the general, "whole package" account stated by staff. (3) They described conflict as a result of perceived injustices in the application of rules when different sets of values, attitudes and beliefs are held by students and teachers. And, (4) knowing the disciplinary consequence did not influence student actions. A description of each participant is followed by elaboration on each theme. The names of the students have been changed to protect their privacy.

Miguel, age 15, the fourth child of ten lives with both parents. He is thin, fair-skinned with an engaging smile. He was polite and soft spoken. The trendy, hip-hop, baggy clothing he wore accentuated his small physical frame.

As a sophomore he should have completed 9 credits but has 2.35 credits. His GPA is .55 on a 4.0 scale. He was in Chapter I programs for the "disadvantaged" in elementary school. When tested for placement in Chapter 1, his records indicated that "bilingualism affects score to some extent." He was almost retained in eighth grade. He is presently failing all six classes.

His attendance profile indicated he was usually absent from class. For example, in April 1994 he was absent 56 times out of 90 times possible. He is consistently late to first period and never attends fourth period.

He was disruptive in elementary school. Miguel was suspended once in middle school for talking in Saturday school. He was given a short term suspension in high school for non-attendance. During the study he was given a 3-day short term suspension that was appealed, overruled and changed to an emergency suspension. He was "charged" with disruptive conduct, non-attendance, disobedience and failure to identify himself (CM1).

Nina, age 16, second child of three lives with her mother and stepfather. She is tall, dark, big-boned, "tough" looking with long, dyed, teased, reddish brown hair-sprayed hair. She wore plain white, ironed t-shirts and men's tan, cotton pants. She is attractive, but looked out of place in this urban school. Perhaps the clothing she wore was in style in the small town where she came from. During the study she confided she was having problems with stepfather and boyfriend.

Nina, a freshman, new to this school 2nd semester, passed her all her classes first semester in her former school, with a 2.57 GPA out of a possible 4.0. She is presently failing all her classes. Because of her movement her school records are incomplete. Although not verified by records, Nina stated she attended a Chapter 1 pullout program in 4th and 5th grade.

Her attendance profile indicated a gradual deterioration. In January she was absent 10% of the time, February 17%, March 38% and in April she was absent 56% of the time. Rarely are her absences excused. She had been suspended five times in her previous high school for stealing, fighting and smoking (CF2).

Carmen, age 18, first born of two girls lives with her mother and stepfather. She is small, thin, fair skinned with long hair. She was shy, soft spoken and polite during the activities. She appeared fragile and unhappy. She did state she did not get along with her step father and wanted to live with her father.

Carmen, a Junior, has failed two classes. Her GPA is 2.03 out of a possible 4.0. She was tested for special education, retained in first grade and assigned to "Title 1 Disadvantaged Resource Room" for two years in elementary school. Carmen is presently passing all six classes.

Her attendance profile indicates she is absent about a quarter of the time. Her absences are often excused by her mother. She usually chooses fifth or sixth period to be absent. Carmen had a short term suspension for "cutting" (CF1).

Jaime , age 16, the first born of three children lives with both parents. He is solidly built, dark, handsome, tall and looks older than he is. He has tattoos on his hands and upper right arm. He disclosed membership in a "gang." He was reticent to speak at first, but within 15 minutes he assumed a leadership role, commanding respect from the other participants. He was witty, funny and gentle. He wore clean, brand-name, hip-hop, baggy clothing.

He is a sophomore with only.55 credits out of 9 credits. His GPA is.53. Jaime participated in Chapter I programs and was repeatedly labeled "at risk" in elementary school. He was recommended for retention in grade 8, but was promoted. This is his 3rd high school. He is presently failing all six classes.

His attendance profile indicated a non-attendance pattern. He was absent 73 out of 90 times possible during April 1994. He never attends first, fourth, fifth or sixth period. He was identified as having behavioral problems as early as first grade. Jaime was suspended 7 times in middle school for fighting, disruptive conduct, swearing in Spanish at a teacher, and expelled for "hitting a teacher with a chair." Teacher allegedly called him a "dirty Mexican." He appealed the expulsion and was reinstated. Records were not available from two of the high schools he attended. One of the high schools was an alternative school for "problem" students. He was assigned to this school after being expelled from another high school. During the study he was given a short term suspension that was appealed, overruled and changed to an emergency suspension. He was "charged" with disruptive conduct, non-attendance, disobedience and failure to identify himself. He was also given a short term suspension for fighting (CM2).

Feelings of Disempowerment and Alienation

Students perceived school as a place where adults held power and control over students who were "nobodies." They felt the classroom was a setting where teachers taught their lesson. The following student comments indicate that they did not argue for equal power, rather agreed teachers had to have quiet and control to teach their lessons.

> They come in with their own priorities, their agenda on how to run the class. Teachers want their power. Kids are supposed to just sit there and do their work while they grade papers and read school stuff (CM2).

> Teachers have to have it their way. It's their classroom. They should have the

right to teach their class (CF1).

> They (teachers) want to show that they are in charge because if they are not in charge that's weakness and weakness means no respect (CM1).

> Well, kids just have to do their work and don't talk (CF2).

They asserted that teachers don't want to waste their time on kids whom they think are "bad," don't attend regularly and are going to act-up and flunk anyway. Students explained:

> She (teacher) doesn't think Joe (not a real name) is smart. She just thinks of him as someone who's going to flunk anyway (CM1).

> Some teachers pick on certain persons. Some teachers want to solve the problem but the rest just want to get them out of class (CM2).

> Teachers expect good behavior and other teachers don't care. They just want to teach lesson and kick or ignore the bad kids out (CF1).

> I don't do it (assignments) because the teachers keep telling me I'm gonna flunk. So why do it. And it's true, so I don't go to class and I don't do the work (CF2).

Since they perceived the teachers' goal was to teach their lesson, their perception of the teacher solution to classroom conflict was to kick the students out, not waste time listening to the problem and get on with the teaching their lesson. Jaime expressed his feelings stating:

> Sometimes I think they don't have time because they want to teach the class. They don't want to deal with an individual kid and they think the kid always lies even before the kid talks. Its saves their time to just kick them out (CM2).

However, they did think that teachers not listening to the student side was unfair. Carmen summarized the students' perceptions when she said:

> They don't listen to the kids' side. They judge you by the way you look. Like you can't do anything. They think you can't express any worthwhile behavior (CM1).

They viewed administrators, pressured by teachers, wanting to keep teachers satisfied. Students were not heard nor seen as important.

> They (teachers) put her (principal) on the spot. They talk bad about us and gave the principal a different impression and told her she should punish us more than what she was gonna do. That's putting pressure. She didn't listen to our side. She didn't take into consideration what we said about what happened before

the teacher came and if she could put all the stuff together and get us expelled. That's what she wanted to do. All that stuff the reason I think she brought out my past was so she could have more of a reason to kick me out cuz what I did wasn't enough. She didn't like me as it is cuz I'm one of those kids that don't go to class and she wanted to get us in trouble. I had done things more serious than being caught in the hall so I felt like I wasn't judged right. I felt I was punished for something petty. I was suspended for something everyone does every single day. They only listened to the teachers (CM2).

According to student perceptions, it is the teacher who starts the disciplinary process by reporting students, and it is the teacher who ultimately is heard, believed and affirmed. It is the teacher's classroom that is disrupted. They repeatedly described feeling of alienation with statements such as:

Jaime

I'm not a school kid. Never been. I'm not connected with what happens in school. Yea, yea, nobody, nobody? We're nobodies (he laughs). What happens in class?..Umm ... I don't feel powerful (in school). It's not my real life. It's boring stuff. I don't fit it. At night I say to myself 'I'm going to school' then I get up, dress and go kick it with my friends. They judge you by your looks. Plus they give you a look that lets you know they don't want you in their class. You're just a kid that's there. Or, it's the way they talk to you like if you ask them to help you they won't discuss it. They say 'Ask your neighbor' or 'It's already been explained' (CM2).

Carmen

Nothing has really ever happened to me that ever really felt good. I just go to school and it's the same ol' thing day after day. There's some teachers that cherish some students more over others and they don't treat you the same. They always believe the teacher over the student even though that shouldn't happen like that (CF1).

Nina

I just hate school I guess. Most of the time I don't even go. Me and my friends just go sit outside and stuff. I want to pass, but then when I get there (to class) I don't care. Cuz school's not for me. I don't do the work. I probably won't ever graduate. I don't care anymore. Once I went to this teacher for help. She act like she don't even care cuz I'm flunking and so what, she's not all that either (CF2).

Miguel

Teachers are the top dogs. Nobody asks me what I think. I'm a bad kid. I've always been bad. I'm bad in school. Nothing good has happened to me (in school) cuz I haven't done nothing good like to be rewarded for. Basically, if they don't like you, it doesn't matter what you do so why waste your time trying. If they don't like you they can change the rules so you get busted. Sometimes I act bad just for fun, everybody laughs (CM1).

In the classroom with their "favorite teachers" students arrived late, left for long periods of time, sat and talked without engaging in the task or isolated themselves holding books as if reading but having eye contact with the space in front of them. In the elementary grades their school records revealed students labeled "at risk" and assigned to special education and Chapter 1 classes for "disadvantaged" students, retention or threats of retention appeared in Middle school along with poor attendance, low CAT test scores and low grade point averages. For the male students disciplinary problems began as early as first grade. Records were not available for one of the females and the other was tested for special education in the primary grades and retained in first grade. High school records indicated low CAT scores, low grade point averages, and established patterns of nonattendance. Teachers described these students as nice kids who are not attending, are isolated, passive or are unable to connect education with the skills needed for future employment. The following teacher perception of students behavior indicate a pattern of alienation.

Miguel's teacher is an older, White, female, science teacher. She appeared uncomfortable talking to me. At first she didn't want to be observed but changed her mind. In the classroom students were assigned questions at the end of the chapter. Miguel changed seats to be closer to a friend and chatted. He didn't take off his coat or hat. He did not take out his book, paper or pencil.

She kept repeating: "I can't comment, he's never here. Most of the time he arrives ten minutes before the bell rings. He has no behavior because he is never here. I don't think he can possibly pass. He is a good boy. He is not loud."

Miguel reflected: "She's afraid to confront kids because the situation will get worse. She's OK to me. I can sit where I want, but I'm not gonna pass" (CM1).

Nina's teacher is an older, White, male language arts teacher. He was willing to discuss Nina and felt students and teachers share the problem of discipline and non-achievement equally. He seemed frustrated with the system and didn't feel he had time to deal with students like Nina. She arrived in class about 20 minutes late and sat

apart from the class at a TA table. Students were reading and working in small groups. The teacher approached her and tried to get her to read or do something. She was polite but did not engage in any classroom activity. She took out a personal note from her book bag and read it.

He stated: "She has a lot of absences. She always isolates herself, but she's not disruptive. She can't stick to things. I have a personal rapport with her but so far it hasn't produced anything. I don't force her to do anything."

Nina commented: "I'm always late or don't come at all. He's cool. He doesn't stress. I know I'm not passing cuz I don't do school work and stuff. I don't know why maybe cuz it's boring" (CF2).

Carmen's teacher is a young, White, male, science teacher. He was pleased and surprised to be chosen by Carmen. He seemed self-assured and positive. In class Carmen was attentive and answered questions. The class changed activities: started with discussion, film and ended with small group work. During the discussion group Carmen asked to be dismissed. She went to the bathroom and was gone for about 15 minutes missing the entire group activity. She returned just before the bell rang.

He described Carmen: "She's passive. She's not loud and actually easy to teach. She doesn't need to be the focus of attention."

Carmen said: "I always get along with my teachers. I always ask to go out to get some space or if it's boring, but if they say no, I don't make a big deal. I just don't go" (CF1).

Jaime's teacher is a middle-aged, White, female teacher. She was positive and willing to share her feelings about Jaime. She wanted to do whatever was necessary to help him succeed. The class was reading silently. In class Jaime was isolated and quiet. He help an open book but his eyes were closed.

She said: "Jaime doesn't seem to value school. He's intelligent. I try to encourage him. About 6 months ago he told me he had family problems and was going to quit school. If he comes everyday and does his assignments he can earn a 'C.'"

Jaime agreed: "She's always glad to see me when I come. She tries to see what you see so she can help you out. I just need to come" (CM2).

In the initial interview when asked for their best and worse moments, none of the student responses were connected with school even though additional probes addressed "school" specifically. All four students' initial response on 'the best thing that happened to you' was "nothing" revealing that nothing good has happened to them at school. The responses to 'the worse thing that happened to you' dealt with interpersonal problems with peers.

In the focus group and final interviews students revealed how they are often told they have no chance of passing the class. They felt that trying to pass was useless, so why bother. As a result, students who were failing and feeling worthless, or who had a reputation of being "bad' had nothing to do in school but to "act-up," thus entertaining their peers with their antics and frustrating the teacher. No one, teachers and peers, believed that these students can "express any worthwhile behavior" (CF1). Students perceived that once a bad reputation was established teachers and peers alike expected and even demanded that they act in that manner. They perceived teachers used their past to "get them for any little thing" (CM1) whether they were responsible or not in order to remove them from the classroom. They also felt their peer expected them to make the class "live" by creating minor, funny disturbances that would ultimately get them referred and removed from the class. In addition, students felt that teachers liking them or not liking them determined how teachers used their power over them. Students concluded that teachers had more power over students they dislike. Feeling that the teacher didn't like them, in turn, caused students to disrespect teachers giving them tacit justification to disrupt these teachers' classrooms. If students thought teachers liked them, they would not disrespect them even when the teacher behavior was judged unfair. Student comments follow:

> Once you get enough respect for a teacher its like a friend. I'm not gonna cuss them out. It's just respect. You just know that teacher is interested in you (CM2).

> If kids don't want a teacher to control them, they just can't. No one just obeys someone. I don't care who they are. But if I know a teacher cares about me, I don't say nothing, but there's only one teacher like that for me (CF1).

> Some kids just can't sit in a class day after day and do boring work, so they rank. I usually laugh when kids mess around and do stuff to make the teacher mad. Teachers don't want to waste their time with the bad kids. They just want to waste their time with the good kids (CM1).

> Kids aren't the main thing in school, the teacher are. If you have a bad reputation they believe the teacher and kids think what's the use they're gonna believe the teacher anyway. They don't hear the kid, maybe not always, but most of the time and not even sometimes. I, ... well, I don't really care anymore (CF2).

Levels of Perception

Students established that the substance of the misbehavior is perceived differently by themselves and teachers because they claim teachers do not listen to their side of the story. The important issues to students, such as who started it, why they are questioning the teacher's

stance and what their reaction means, are misunderstood due to lack of communication, miscommunication, or the teacher's refusal to spend time on the disciplinary issue.

However, students also perceived differences on a higher level of abstraction according to the content of the disciplinary event. Students dealt with the specificity of the act, or in their words the "pieces" of what happened as opposed to teachers viewing the act as a 'whole case' to show that the students deserve to be punished. According to student perception, teachers know you have been "bad" so they present a case that is believable. Teachers disregard all the specific components, thus, in the students' view, are essentially lying in order to strengthen their case. Students do not think this teacher behavior is necessarily intentional, but rather it is "the teacher's way of seeing things" (CM1). Students on the other hand, trying to be heard, are not arguing the fact that they might have been bad but are questioning the inconsistencies in the teachers' case that might exonerate them. For example, a student's version of "the truth" described teachers' perception of the act prior to a suspension for being in the hall and disturbing a class:

> ...cause she (teacher) knew we were doing wrong and all the little pieces where she lied didn't matter. She thought we shouldn't have been in the hall in the first place so she told how she seen everything and that who they believed didn't matter and it didn't matter if it didn't fit. She just had her puzzle together and me and Sam had all the pieces which were the truth. But the teacher was so caught up in that we did something wrong that she, well nobody would listen. We could have solved something. We would have been able to work something out (CM2).

The students felt that the truth as they knew it, such as the door being open, versus them opening it, the disturbance taking place only yesterday not today and yesterday, and two people involved not three would lessen the severity, thus impact the type and amount of punishment.

Perceived Injustices in the Application of Rules

Students perceived teachers treating students differently when different sets of values, attitudes and beliefs were held by students and teachers. For example, the students said if teachers do not like the way you look (hair, clothing style and ethnicity) they will pick on you and hold you accountable for actions that are acceptable for other students in the class. A typical example was that "bad" ethnic minority students were tagged and punished for breaking rules such as talking, not doing work, and arriving tardy without acceptable excuses, while other students doing the same thing were overlooked by the teacher. If the "bad" student defended themselves and tried to explain or demand just treatment, this often escalated into major

confrontations. At that point the disciplined students would often curse at the teacher causing their removal from the classroom.

Students perceived this type of rule changing as a control device used by the teacher to either get rid of students who do not do work and disturb the class or the exercise of power inherent in the teacher's role against students they do not like. For example, Jaime and Miguel were suspended and ultimately given an emergency expulsion (emergency expulsions are usually given to students who fight, threaten a teacher or have a weapon or drugs in school) for being in the halll, talking to girls and disturbing a class. Jaime stuck his tongue out at the teacher to make the girls laugh. Since what the boys did was considered by to be minor in comparison to the punishment received, Carmen concluded that they were punished on their past reputation, not being liked by staff and on the way they looked:

> You're known as being suspended so they'll just suspend you again. It ain't fair. She doesn't like Jaime. Oh I get it. It sounds she doesn't like Jaime by the way he looks. They judge you by the way you look, the way you dress, the way you carry yourself. Look at Jaime. Look at the way he looks. He doesn't look "White" so to her he don't look nice. He doesn't look respectful. She's not, well, White people will see him as a Mexican (she laughs). It makes me mad, just because of the way he looks, they think he's a menace to society just for knocking on the door and talking to some stupid girl (CF1).

Students felt that if teachers would interact more with students by changing teaching strategies or learning activities there would not be a need to have so many rules that are indiscriminately applied. For example:

> Carmen: Why don't they just make learning fun to begin with. Who can sit there and do those stupid diffos over and over. Or ...
>
> Miguel: In some classes all we do is write the answers in the back of the chapters, daah... That's real fun.
>
> Carmen: We could have fun like get into groups and do stuff. No, they just want us to sit there dead.
>
> Miguel: Like in 'Mrs. X class.' She jokes around, people work in groups people can move around, the work is hard and stuff and man like serious teachers like man its so boring so kids do stuff just to make it live. Kids have to make it fun. They rank on the teacher and you

have to laugh when that happens and the teacher gets mad and the whole class is doing nothing.

Miguel was probed regarding having "activities in the class" he said:

It's like they don't want to do activities and stuff because they have to, you know, think of all the things to do and stuff. It's easier for them to grade when we do stuff out of the book (CM1).

Knowledge of the Disciplinary Consequence

During the probing, students were asked if they were aware of the consequence of their actions when they made decisions not to comply with teachers directives. Students knew what would happen. For example if they talked during Saturday school, they knew it meant a three day suspension, or if they chose to curse a teacher out, it meant suspension. However, knowledge of the consequence did not determine the choice of action taken by the students. Factors such as being with their friends, supporting their friends, defending themselves, maintaining a sense of self respect and fighting for what they felt was just were stronger influences than the forthcoming penalty.

They stated that when the issue was racial, they chose to back down and seemingly do nothing. The reason for this behavior was fear of getting too agitated as to act in a way that would endanger them. For example, they did not want to slap or hit the teacher who called Chicano students "Dirty Mexicans," or deal with what they perceived to be intentional racial slurs on the part of adults, such as "your people are on welfare and sell drugs" or "if you're here illegally." They thought they would be out of control, hit the teacher and end up in jail. Instead they chose to keep the anger inside or tell their parents of the incident.

Jaime was expelled for throwing a chair at a teacher who called him a "dirty Mexican." According to Jaime, the chair went "nowhere near the teacher" but he did throw it toward the teacher. He seemed aware it was best to control the impulse to strike back when really angry. Nina explained her feelings in this manner:

I can tell when people are prejudiced. Most of the time I don't care cuz of who they are, anyways it still gets me mad. But I don't do anything when I'm really mad. Like when that drivers ed teacher was saying all that stuff like welfare and selling drugs, because if I hit him I'll just go to jail (CM2).

DISCUSSION

The simplicity and honesty in the student perceptions are not only powerful, but clearly indicative of the cultural discontinuity operating within the school climate among diverse

students and teachers. Cultural discontinuities in student-teacher relationships were evident when contrasting interpersonal needs such as students liking and not liking teachers, communication, and the need for mutual respect. These issues appeared to be more important to these students than what they perceived as the school's focus on teaching the lesson. They felt teachers considered it a waste of ime to deal with disciplinary issues. They thought teachers with positive, interpersonal relationships with them influenced not only disruptive behavior but determined decisions whether to control their behavior. It was interesting to note that the two students who were involved in a greater number and higher degree of severity in disciplinary actions, both male and female, were physically "big," dark-skinned, with clearly defined, minority ethnic features; thus, perhaps they were considered intimidating or were unintentionally pre-judged.

These student perceptions and school records added to the literature which has found a causal relationship between students with low academic achievement and who do not engage in classroom activities with students who often experience disciplinary problems (Doyle, 1986). The four students in this study all had or have both low achievement outcomes and disciplinary problems.

This research concurs with Williams' (1992) finding that often there appears to be a lack of consistency in determining and matching the severity of the punishment to the actual infraction. Perhaps this accounts for the increase in the number of appeals resulting in modifications, mediations and reversals of administrative initiated suspensions and expulsions in the urban district where this study took place. Students in this study, when disciplined, were not always given oral or written notice of the charges nor were parents informed prior to sending student home. They perceived that they were penalized because of a prior "reputation" as disruptive students. Punishment was, at times, unduly harsh. Rudeness and disrespect toward an adult usually resulted in a one day suspension. There appeared to be no accountability for the behavior of the teachers and administrator, which was a concern of these students.

In the school where the study took place, writing and submitting a referral to an administrator for disciplinary action was the typical mode of discipline for classroom teachers when they identifed students as being out of control. The decision to refer a student was left totally to the discretion of the individual who witnesses the infraction, usually the teacher. According to student perceptions this resulted in different treatments for students based on teachers' level of comfort with inappropriate behavior, their values, prejudices and personal judgement of who looked "bad."

Agreeing with Garza-Lubeck (1992), the students in this study dentified poor classroom management, boring instructional content, as well as rude, negative behavior on the part of the student as factors causing confrontations. Students in this study reported that personally receiving or seeing others receive referrals were daily occurrences.

SIGNIFICANCE

Some researchers (Williams, 1992; Fine, 1986) use empirical data that documents the pejorative outcomes of disproportional disciplinary actions taken against ethnic minorities to justify the need for school reform or to define its ineffectiveness. This study's contribution to scholarly efforts uses high school Chicano student perceptions to help understand from their own perspectives why a disproportionate amount of disciplinary action is directed toward them. This unit of analysis has rarely been used in previous research. These students' stories of how they cope and why they choose to act in 'socially unacceptable' ways may provide general important information that can be useful in future theory building and to reform school practices. Using the cultural discontinuity theory as a critical part of the conceptual framework for studying discipline in the classroom may extend it to include social learning as well as other dimensions of learning.

Since the purpose of this study was to identify student perceptions in regard to disciplinary actions experienced and witnessed by them, the results, may assist educators in ameliorating confrontations, decrease the suspension and expulsion rate and improve the overall quality of education for ethnically and culturally diverse students. It adds another interpretive lens and unit of analysis to the growing body of qualitative research from an "insiders' perspective" that is examining the effects of language, social, cultural and ethnic variables on educational opportunities and outcomes for different groups of students. This includes researchers who are sensitive to the needs of ethnic minority students, committed to their achieving equity of educational outcome, and are studying participants and communities that are similar to their own origin and cultural orientations. By using conversation groups, this study purposefully employed qualitative research methodology that is culturally relevant to the preferred learning, social and cultural styles of the participants and the researcher. Foster (1991) states that although there is no consensus that minority scholars are better equipped to study ethnic minority groups, of greater significance is that insiders are joining outsiders in addressing the improvement of schooling.

This study has directly affected the behavior of the students. For example, due to the focus group and interpersonal contact with the researcher and the researcher with the home, two of the four students have dramatically improved their attendance and have verbalized a change in their overall attitude toward learning. This may be an example of an interventionist approach to qualitative research (Foster 1991). In her edited volume of qualitative investigations by scholars of color and women, three of the fourteen studies intervened in the lives of the participants and thus served as initiators for action or "catalysts for change" (p. 3). Perhaps dialogue among students and with students requires reflective thinking, which King (1991) argues is "at the heart of the development of critical consciousness and forms of knowledge that serve social action" (p. 265).

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